

Students learn about life with toxic waste

By Judith Berne
staff writer

What do a mom and pop cleaners and a Muskegon-based chemical company have in common?

West Bloomfield High School students will tell you it is the potential for toxic waste, a problem they'll be dealing with for generations.

Their new-found understanding of the subject comes firsthand from representatives of a company once held responsible for illegal dumping of benzene — a known cause of cancer in human beings.

Patrick Murphy and James Cousino of Bofors Nobel Inc. and Lakeway Inc. chemical company based in Muskegon, met with science students last week.

All were participants in the 26th Annual Frontiers in Science Day, sponsored by the Michigan Chemical Council through Oakland University.

High-school teachers left their classrooms to confer with chemical company representatives at Oakland, while chemistry professionals met with their students.

"There are numerous studies that

show toxic waste is what everybody's concerned about," Murphy told the attentive students.

"TWENTY YEARS ago, chemical companies took their waste out on the back 40 and left it," related Murphy, a former Detroit News reporter, later administrative assistant to Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley.

In four years with the state, Murphy saw 25 court cases related to illegal chemical dumping. But he cites Environmental Protection Agency studies which suggest there are "hundreds if not thousands of areas in Michigan where chemicals have been illegally dumped."

Lakeway Chemical Co., now a part of the Swedish firm of Bofors Nobel,

must detoxify acres of benzene stored in barrels which allegedly were leaking into the water system, Murphy told the students.

Murphy illustrated that when rain hits the waste, it trickles into the ground water and eventually into the water table, which runs everywhere "even under the Sahara Desert, if you dig deep enough."

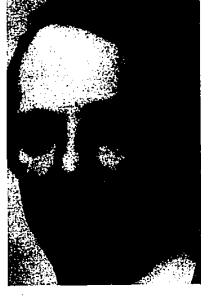
With the court on its back, the company was forced to come up with a system to both isolate the contamination and cut off the water supply system.

ROFORS NOBEL installed purge wells to suck up contaminated water and are constructing a special incinerator where fumes are collected, filtered to purify and then expelled into the air as clear air. "It's an investment to take care of the old problem and get rid of new waste," Murphy said.

Another way of handling it would have been to dig a huge clay-lined tomb to isolate the waste and provide safeguards that the property will not be used for anything without the consent of the Attorney General and the courts.

"We still manufacture chemicals that are toxic," he said. "We know that chemicals can be dangerous. We guard against these things. There is a need for chemicals."

Educator to speak



William Hausman

Dr. William R. Hausman, president of North Park College and Theological Seminary, Chicago, will speak at a Detroit-area North Park dinner at 7 p.m. Monday in Faith Covenant Church, 35415 W. 14 Mile Road, Farmington Hills.

Hausman will report on current activities at North Park, including a campaign to raise \$1.5 million for the restoration of Old Main, the school's first building.

Old Main, completed in 1894, was entered Feb. 11 on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Detroit-area North Park dinner is one of 33 around the country at which Hausman is speaking during the school year.

A scorcher

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